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OUR SECRETARY.

WE are only now beginning to take stock of losses, and to repair damages, after the great commercial cyclone that sent to the bottom so many stately seeming barks, that strained and shattered so many more. Far and wide, lie strewn upon the beach the corpses that a couple of years ago were instinct with the vigorous life of an exuberant credit. Here and there, we see some lucky adventurer, sole survivor of a hapless crew, swept up by the receding waves, and left safe and sound above high-water mark. Some of these, too, have escaped, not only with their lives, but with their substance. They managed to secure their valuables on their persons, and now they rise, shake themselves like water-spaniels, and walk away just as if nothing had happened. The world is before them still, and they carry the golden knife that is warranted to open that uncompromising oyster.

Our Secretary is one of the lucky few. He would probably tell you that he owed his safety to a rare combination of courage and prudence. We who, less fortunate, are still tossed about at the mercy of the winds and waves, can only comfort ourselves with the proverb, that those who are born to be hanged will never be drowned.

When the Universal Finance Company was launched, the sea seemed so smooth, the weather so settled and so promising, that we who owned her troubled ourselves but little about the qualifications of the captain and the crew. For many a long year, a wreck had been a thing unheard of in these summer seas. Any sort of raft, with the merest shred of a rag, rigged up to do duty for a sail, served to carry you across them. People scarcely thought of looking at the craft they had chartered and freighted, and paying insurance premiums would have been regarded as a reckless and unprofitable outlay. To drop metaphor: most of us who wrote for shares in the 'Universal' knew as little about its Chairman's character and means as we did of the religious tenets or political leanings of the Grand Lama. As for the Board of Directors, it looked as pretty a list, on paper,

as you would care to read. There was a sprinkling of aristocrats among a number of men of business, the solvency of each one of whom was guaranteed by his connection with a dozen of similar concerns. The brokers of the company had all the essentials of respectability, for the designation of the firm took up a line and a half of moderately large print, and contained seven or eight separate names. There could be no doubt about the high character of its bankers, and it did not suggest itself to us that it did not follow that we must have an unlimited credit there. Applications poured in for thrice the number of shares at the disposal of the promoters; and at the first meeting of shareholders, when the board of directors was definitively fixed, it was mentioned as among the most cheering auguries for the new company that Mr Rothschild Baring, the Provisional Secretary, had consented to continue to the Company his permanent services in that capacity. Enthusiastic cheering followed the announcement. Mr Baring, who had been seated at one corner of the long writing-table which barred off the range of promoters from the *deities* of their followers, bowed his graceful acknowledgments with a dignified condescension. Mr Baring was evidently a man who knew his own value, at least as well as the directors did, and in their own interests, was determined to take from the first a high tone with the shareholders, treating them *de haut en bas*. In acting as their paid servant, and discharging the necessary duties, he compromised with his dignity by letting it be clearly seen that he did it under protest, as a stately butler contemptuously dashes the sherry into the glass of a shabby curate, or a fashionable stock-broker takes the commission of a saving costermonger.

During the proceedings, Mr Baring had been reclining in a luxurious lounging elbow-chair, now munching nonchalantly the feather of a quill, now trimming fastidiously with a penknife a set of filbert nails that tapered away into eagle talons. Those long flexible fingers, with their clawy appendages, might have suggested that nature had formed the wearer to rake in tills, and

pick up coins in the speculative Tom Tiddler's ground. When occasionally responding to the deferentially expressed request of our chairman, he consented to disturb himself so far as to read over minutes and resolutions and other formal documents, he did it in an airy and deliberately off-hand manner. One hand was elegantly disposed under the tails of his frock-coat, the other held the obnoxious papers at half-arm's length. We felt a deferential awe steal over us, in spite of ourselves, as we marked the deportment of Our Secretary. It began to suggest itself to us that great as was the chair, there might be a something behind it greater than the chair itself.

Mr Baring was a man of business—that was evident from his consenting to serve as secretary to the Universal; but he was likewise a man of fashion—that was more obvious still. Of course, he must be a scion of the great House of merchant-nobles whose name he bore, and a name like that would never link itself to anything but enterprise of the most unimpeachable character. We were less clear as to the precise nature of his connection with the rival Hebrew capitalists; but one little man, who seemed to know all about it, pledged himself distinctly that Our Secretary was a sprig of the Neapolitan branch that bore that golden name, and I think most of us thenceforward accepted that version as one of our articles of faith in the simple creed we held regarding the company. Judging from Mr Baring's dress, he was determined that the fashion of his exterior should not disgrace his high connections. *Noblesse oblige*, and a man so evidently formed to shine at the West, was not to be extinguished, because his eccentric orbit happened to carry him into the grimy East. Perhaps committees of taste, sitting on the park rails, and critics of bow-windows in St James's Street, would have been inclined to pronounce him overdressed. It is possible that Mr Baring's contempt for the slough donned by the City men whom a hard fortune had cast him among, may have hurried him into an opposite extreme. Long wavy locks of a raven black, greased like those of a Sandwich islander, and carefully parted down the centre, were brushed back from his ears, and fell over an exceedingly low-cut drooping collar. *En revanche*, the small gray eyes were sharp enough, and the shaven mouth affected a sarcastic curl, that shewed a rather good set of teeth. Dress Mr Baring in the extreme of the then fashion, button his frock-coat below the waist, curl the brim of his hat above its crown, curl it into the segment of a semicircle, and give him half-a-dozen inches of wristbands, clasped by golden studs, large as half-crowns, and you have the outline of his portrait. It took us longer to acquaint ourselves with those qualities, which, as our chairman assured us, did equal honour to Our Secretary's head and heart. In the meantime, we agreed to secure them on trust, at the moderate outlay of fifteen hundred pounds per annum.

So the Universal was started, with Lord Clanmoyle, an Irish peer of aboriginal Celtic extraction, as chairman, and Mr Rothschild Baring as secretary. A board which so freely blended the aristocratic with the business element was scarcely likely to do things after a shabby fashion. Mr Baring, too, shewed a lively interest in arrangements in which the comfort of the board, of the shareholders, of the clients—and of himself—were so deeply involved. His energy secured the most cheerful chambers in a spacious thoroughfare near Thread-

needle Street. The board rooms, the private apartment of the chairman, were lofty, large, and excessively comfortable; but the snug chamber devoted to Mr Baring's own use was a model of chaste good taste and unpretending luxury. Turkey carpets, elbow-chairs padded with Utrecht velvet, escritoirs with countless drawers, bronze ornamented safes, marble clocks, ormolu inkstands and letter-weights, were scattered about with a tasteful profusion. The most minute details did not escape the grasp of that comprehensive and versatile intellect. Small looking-glasses, after the Dutch fashion, were attached to the sides of the windows, that the Secretary might at will, and without the trouble of rising from his chair, people his solitude with the bustling crowd that surged past on the pavements below. Journals, morning, evening, and weekly, lay scattered over the tables, doubtless that, in the interests of the company, he might combine and digest in his brain all the latest city intelligence. On the whole, Mr Baring's disinterestedness was his own reward, and in serving the company, he contrived to serve himself.

Inviting as seemed his quarters in Bank Street, Mr Baring was not invariably to be found there. People there were who said that he found himself oppressed by the not unreasonable hours imposed upon him. Whenever he got a chance, this butterfly of fashion would flutter out into the street, and, if possible, on to the more congenial parks and promenades of the West. Certain it was, that each fine afternoon in the season, while his juniors were yet affecting to toil in their prison at the East, Mr Baring might be seen strutting up the broad pavement of Piccadilly, with an infinitely more methodical punctuality than he paced that of Bank Street, when his head was turned officewards of a morning. When these cavils were carried to his ears, Mr Baring was pleased to take high ground: he thanked Heaven that he took a wider view of the scope of his duties than the mole-eyed, money-grubbing critics who had the hardihood to impeach his tactics. The first essential for a rising finance company was connection. In those pushing days, plums did not drop into the open mouths of sleepers, and spiders might starve if they waited for flies to tumble into their webs. What was the use of having a man of position, connection, and energy for their secretary, if they did not mean to avail themselves of these advantages? If that was their idea, and if he was prevented from discharging his duties conscientiously, he should owe it to himself to sever his connection with the company, high as was the value he set upon it. They might replace him with a mere plodding man of business, who would better meet their views. Of course, so terrible a threat, if it did not silence the malignants, had at least the effect of drowning their murmurs in the chorus of deprecatory expostulation raised by the majority. Director after director, shareholder after shareholder went, one after the other, to smooth down the bristles of the insulted Secretary, till at last that forgiving character consented to be appeased. He even heaped burning coals on their heads by deigning to accept at their hands a gold cup filled with sovereigns, presented as a trifling token of their gratitude for the unsparing energy which went so far to promote the prosperity of the company. Although the presentation was ostensibly a voluntary one, and subscribed for by private individuals, it came out later, that the chairman and board had, with a

high sense of justice, mulcted the calumnious shareholders for the tribute that consoled their victim. They took the simple plan of subscribing most handsomely themselves, and comprehending the amount of such subscriptions under some general head of expenditure, which they carried to the debit of preliminary expenses.

Cheered by this substantial proof of their approbation, Our Secretary did more than ever to prove that he had deserved it; above all, he enlisted more freely than before in their service his eminent social qualities. Strange as it may appear, he did not belong to any West-end club, although to attain that end he would almost have spared one of those ears that he displayed so conspicuously. The world is jealous of superior merit; and Mr Baring was so distinguished in his peculiar style, that he could never expect to pass unmarked, and be balloted in, in a crowd. He was just one of the men that those who affect to be hypercritical invariably black-ball. If Mr Baring had a weakness, it was perhaps an undue appreciation of those blessings which envy denied to him. He moved round the gates of clubs like the Peri round those of Paradise; and the surest passport to his friendship was a dinner in the Strangers' Room of any of those institutions that pretended to anything of an exclusive character. When the heart of the Secretary was softened by the dry champagne, and his brain warmed by the Château Lafitte, he was, as it turned out, too apt to blend business with pleasure; then he would lend a too willing ear to the pleading voice of his *convive*, or attribute solid foundations to what, as he must have seen, were mere castles in the air. More than once did he give a pledge over the claret which it wanted all the suggestive and courage-giving influences of next morning's brandy and soda-water to enable him to redeem. Shareholders who had dined themselves for a modest one-shilling-and-sixpence, little knew that that evening their Secretary was feasting at an expense to the company of perhaps a couple of thousands. The securities tendered at these symposia, and accepted subsequently by the board as a matter of course, on Mr Baring's approval, were almost as shaky as the Secretary's hand before he had had recourse to something to brace his nerves on the following morning. After all, Mr Baring's club friends were, generally speaking, mere sprats and minnows floating on the skirts of the financial world; and although they bit greedily enough for their size, all they swallowed might have been spared, and little missed, or perhaps even covered by speculative profits elsewhere.

But there were leviathans of a far more capacious swallow, who had already, as they thought, taken Our Secretary's measure, and had their eyes fixed on the treasures he had in charge. These men worked round in a gigantic routine system of accommodation bills. They signed and swore for each other uncompromisingly and unflinchingly; their autographs ought to have been good for millions, for at least their commitments were counted by them. They might have had some trouble in constructing their strong though hollow system of machinery, and in setting it agoing; but once at work, it seemed to move pretty much of itself; all the more so, that although the ground seemed level enough, in reality it was very much down-hill. The wheels, however, wanted a little oiling from time to time, and the old credit

establishments had a not unnatural prejudice against their mushroom rivals, and were inclined to vent it by denying to these last what they termed legitimate facilities. Of course, then, they had to seek the money elsewhere, and they turned accordingly to the less prejudiced and more enlightened financiers of the modern school. They had marked out Mr Baring as one of the most developed of those advanced political economists; they found in that gentleman a kindred spirit, and he and they soon understood each other perfectly. Mr Baring at once appreciated the principles on which these far-seeing capitalists went to work, and convinced himself of their soundness. Once converted himself, he willingly made himself their mouthpiece with the board. Enormous advances were made to them on his recommendation; while, on their part, shares, bonds, and debentures of other companies they were concerned in were so lavishly lodged as to leave an ample margin for security. The system of money testimonials to the Secretary, which had been inaugurated by the Universal's directors and shareholders themselves, was followed up by their clients. These gentlemen, although they did not affect extraordinary refinement, had yet the delicacy to conceal their generosity. Their testimonials to the Secretary were presented in secret, and took the form of cheques, drawn in three or more figures, as the case might be. All parties were pleased, and had reason to be so. The borrowers spun the ball of speculation all the quicker; trade developed itself in the most unprecedented manner; and the country wallowed in a plethora of prosperity. As was right and proper, the Universal had its own share of sunshine, an ample share of the golden flood flowed aside to fill its coffers, and the board with good reason congratulated the shareholders when it declared a dividend and bonus at the rate of twenty per cent. Millionaires came to deal with them from all the ends of the earth. Ramechunder Cursetjeeboy, the great Parsee from Bombay, did them the honour to borrow forty thousand pounds, and amply covered the advance by deposits of shares in his Red Sea Reclamation Scheme, and the Bokhara government bank. Selim Bey, an Egyptian speculator, drew for eighty thousand pounds against debentures of his great company for dredging up the deposits carried down to the Mediterranean by the Nile, and boating them back to create market-gardens in the Nubian Desert. These enterprising investors, and many smaller ones, reckoned with much reason upon fabulous profits, and were therefore justified in promising a miraculous interest. As, by agreement, the first instalment of the interest was deducted from the advance, for six months nothing could be more sound than the principle on which the company conducted their business. Our Secretary could point to our progress with an honest pride, and could even venture to hint to Lord Clanmoyle, 'Alone I did it.' He lived in a vortex of society where men flung about by handfuls the wealth they so lightly came by, and where they scattered gold and bank-notes broadcast, sure that the more freely they sowed, the more richly would they reap. Night after night had Mr Baring the embarrassment of selecting from a list of dinners, where his wealthy protégés entertained, according to the season, at Richmond or Greenwich, the *Ship and Turtle*, or the *London Tavern*.

But Mr Baring was at least as sagacious and prudent as enterprising. While he was the benefactor

of so many of his fellow-creatures, he did not forget to do common justice to himself. While others insisted in lapping him in luxury, his well-gotten gains kept rolling up fast, and as he knew our commercial climate to be an uncertain one, he kept making up a purse against a rainy day. Admirable speculation, as, thanks to his energy, the Universal was safe to prove, the idea of an official dabbling in the shares of his own company would of course have been utterly repugnant to all his ideas of right and wrong. Mr Baring's especial investments were government stocks and real property. The event shewed that, even in this wicked world, a strict adherence to principle may often bring its own reward. The mercury in the commercial weather-glass began to sink, in indication of approaching storms. A slow but steady fall set in, in all manner of stocks, and the share-lists became much less pleasant reading for promiscuous adventurers than they used to be. Some few, who were preternaturally wise, or who had caught a glimpse of what was going on behind the scenes, took the hint, accepted the first slight loss, got out of everything they held, and having made all snug above, went down below, and quietly waited for the dirty weather. The shares of the Universal had fallen considerably, and Our Secretary exhausted his powers of execution and fancy in a rosy-tinted Report, closing it with a curt balance-sheet, that brought out assets very much in excess of liabilities. He did not follow it up with an analysis of the value of the autographs attached to the bills we held. It could therefore be no fault of his that the directors—as it appeared subsequently they did—began to throw their shares on the market, and to part with every one they held, beyond the very few that qualified them to draw their remuneration.

The storm broke at last; house after house came down; capitalist after capitalist collapsed or emigrated, converting into portable property everything he held that would command any sort of price. When the explosion came, knots of speculative financiers, with whom Mr Baring had been hand in glove, scattered like the fragments of a Boxer shell, flying in their several ways across the Channel, the German Ocean, and the Atlantic. Their bills came fluttering back fast, settling in piles on the handsome mahogany writing-table of Our Secretary. Alas, they find the money-drawer empty, and a balance in three figures at the company's bankers. Anxious shareholders began to form *queues* in the ante-chamber of the office, and to ask all sorts of impertinent questions, which, according to official *etiquette*, ought to have stood over to the next General Meeting. The larger holders were, as a rule, too much busied elsewhere to be there, or had too many irons in the fire, to give much time to looking after any particular one. It was, generally speaking, the smaller fry, holders of ten, twenty, and thirty shares, who attended in force. There were widows with orphans in their hands; matrons in humble life, who let lodgings and kept mangles; gray-haired old officers of good rank and small income. There was the most unbusiness-like weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and in some cases most forcibly indecorous language, which the weaker sex, I regret to say, seemed to condone, if they did not echo. Our Secretary rose equal to the occasion. Even the directors seemed to have a delicacy about facing their constituents. They shot stealthily up

the staircases and along the corridors, with none of the self-important bustle of a few months before, and drew long breaths of relief when they had placed a thick mahogany door between them and the applicants for information. Lord Clanmoyle had fairly succumbed, and lay on his sofa in the Albany, groaning with gout and anxiety. Our Secretary was imperturbably genial as ever. He seemed never wearied by importunities, and not in the least put out by them. He pointed out that the shareholders had a most valuable property; that the manner in which it had stood two days of panic argued it impregnable. He shewed them, as a practical man, that were anything unpleasant to happen, they would only have to thank the suicidal policy which seemed to question the credit of their own establishment. He remarked with a sigh, that only a delicacy about compromising his own good name as secretary of the company prevented his walking across to the Stock Exchange, and laying the foundations of a princely fortune, by purchasing the company's shares at their present quotations.

So admirable a specific for unreasoning panic is firm, sound common-sense, that those who listened to him departed much consoled, if not altogether reassured, while one or two of the more enthusiastic, acting on his hint, rushed over to Capel Court, and invested wildly. No man can control the future, and the wisest of us may be deceived. People said that the managing secretary ought to have known more of the position of the company; but in these hours, events ripened fast, and many a man sneaked home a beggar at night who came out in the morning pluming himself on being a capitalist. Mr Baring may have lost his head, or may in his good-nature have given encouragement that did less honour to that than to his heart. What is certain is, that next morning, those early birds who went to pick up the first worms of information found the establishment shut. What passed behind its closed doors on that melancholy day, we have no means of knowing. Rumours transpired that the directors were very hard indeed on their energetic secretary, and that one excited gentleman, who had been in the habit of lavishing his autograph, at Mr Baring's request, with an extreme facility and docility, threatened personal violence. Whatever may have passed, it did not seem to affect Mr Baring's spirit or appetite, who gave himself a little change of scene after the unpleasant excitement of the day, and running down to Brighton, was seen that evening dallying with a comfortable little dinner in one of the windows at the *Bedford*.

Since then, Mr Baring has been kept on the strength of the establishment; and although his duties have been comparatively light, as matters have been taken very much out of his hands by the professional liquidators, he has continued to draw his fifteen hundred pounds a year. At the second meeting of the shareholders, when the call of twenty pound a share was made that sent so many of us to Basinghall Street, and some possibly to the poor-house, there was a resolution moved that his salary should be cut down to one half, as well as an amendment that he should be dismissed altogether. Neither were carried. It was rumoured that many of the directors would have been not displeased had Mr Baring placed his resignation in their hands. But Mr Baring absolutely declined. He might possibly have made some rather damaging

revelations. He certainly said that he could do so, and at anyrate he found himself supported by the whole strength of the board. It might have touched the hardest heart, that neat little speech in which he said that the slightest hint of the feelings of the shareholders would have been sufficient for him, had he not felt that his character was at stake in resisting what was tantamount to a vote of censure on it. It did not touch those of his auditors; and when he sat down, wiping a tear from his eye with his highly scented pocket-handkerchief, one coarse-minded man raised the cry of 'gammon,' and some malignant and passionate ruffians vituperated his cherished character, and even threatened violence on his person.

Mr Baring has continued to pocket affronts and salary. He is seldom detained late in the City, and may generally be seen in Rotten Row of an afternoon, mounted on the very perfect little park hack which was, I believe, presented to him in happier times by the speculative Parsee. He has few acquaintances at that end of the town, and seems much alone among the giddy crowd. His brow may be calm to outward seeming, but I fear that, like the rest of us, he has his causes of anxiety. It is whispered that a large shareholder, who had been arbitrated out of the company on some point of difference, but whose shares had not been duly transferred, has obtained an opinion from eminent counsel that Mr Baring is liable for the costly results of his neglect in not seeing the transfer carried through. If this is the case, it is to be feared that, after all, Our Secretary may even now be making his election between ruin and perpetual banishment from the scenes he adorns: it may even possibly be his fate to submit to both.

FOUND DEAD.

CHAPTER III.—'GOING TO THE MEET.'

NOTWITHSTANDING that the parting interview between 'Frank' and his 'Lotty' had extended to a limit which more befitted the leave-taking of two young lovers than that of a middle-aged couple, whereof one was a fox-hunter, it was still early in the November morning. As the squire trotted quietly through the straggling village, not a shop-front (and there were half-a-dozen in all) was as yet unclosed. The carters and labourers were already up and gone; the domestic servants had not made their appearance on the front-door steps. As he passed by the vicarage, there was but one window with its blind up; and from behind it Parson Mellish, shaving, gave him a friendly nod, and as much of a smile as the soap-suds would permit. He saw no other face in Allgrove. A sharp turn to the left, and the steep, though winding road had to be breasted which led on to the downland, after which almost the whole of his way lay over the hard turf, studded with mole-hills, that were but yesterday of iron, and seamed with huge ruts, whose first indentations had been made as likely as not by scythe-wheeled chariots. An out-of-the-way and old-world route indeed, now used only by sportsmen like himself, by drovers taking their vast flocks of sheep to Newnham Market, and now and then by some farmer in his jolting gig, whose sore-tried springs squeaked their disapprobation of the way. From some points of the high table-land, if it were not so foggy as it is to-day, you looked into the vales

on either hand, and in each might see the heavy line of vapour that hung above the puffing steam-horse, as he ran from country town to country town; but for the most part there was nothing but patches of furze, and here and there a thorn-bush, to break the endless view of rolling down. In winter-time, along the dreary way, there was no sign of man, no house or hut—nothing beyond a lambing-box on wheels, or rotting shepherd's hurdle, its damp straw whirled and torn by the autumn wind—from Allgrove on the Rill to Newnham, except in one place, which the squire is now rapidly approaching; and a curious spot it is.

Imagine on this stoneless, treeless tract a little hamlet girt about with young plantations, and even shewing a few potato-plots by way of garden—an oasis 'islanded amid the waste.' At a distance, the place looks quite a little town; but its wonder lies not in its population (for there are but four cottages in all), but in its wealth of building material. Dotted about in a vast circle, accurately planned, though here and there a stone is missing, like a tooth from a giant's jaw, are thirty Druid Stones, gigantic unhewn masses, the presence of every one of which in such a spot is little short of a miracle, and suggests unheard-of labour. How did it get there? Without patent rollers—nay, without the simplest mechanical contrivances of modern times, how was so huge a mass transported to that desolate, wind-swept height? How many yoke of oxen, how many straining scores of men, must it have taken to erect the least of them! What submission to authority, what servile or superstitious fear, must have animated the workers! No drover's whip could have urged to such a task, no richest guerdon could have repaid the toil; yet there the Wonder stands. Difficult, however, as may have been the erection of these monuments of antiquity, it is comparatively easy, by help of fire and water, and a blacksmith's hammer, to mutilate them, the consequence of which is that many of them are reduced to mere torsos. Every cottage is built of their *debris*, every wall is composed of them: the very gaps in the hedges are filled up with giant fragments; and the pigs for once are favoured with stone mansions. The whole of this mighty Circle stood on the squire's land, and I am sorry to say that, although he had a wholesome horror of reform, he had but little respect for antiquity; hence these depredations upon time, these chippings of sacred things, went on without rebuke.

As its owner rode by the venerable place, with its mystic masses looming through the mist more vast than usual, he thought not of what purposes it might of old have served; whether human victims had been sacrificed (as some learned men contended) on yonder mound; or whether (as others held) the bucks' horns and bones at times dug up there accounted for all the slain. No coin had as yet been found there except that treasure-trove of Jem Templar's, which the squire had now in his pocket, with the object of disposing of it, to the best advantage of his tenant, to Dr Fungus. But he had no time to speak to Jem about that now, but only nodded to him as he stood bareheaded in his little strip of garden. He was late for the meet, he knew, and trotted on apace down what was still called 'the Stone Avenue' (though the stones had disappeared), and close by the grassy heaps, beneath which had lain

for so many centuries the believers in a creed outworn. No, Frank Blissett thought not of Priest nor Victim, but threw shrewd glances at his young plantations, their green tops (although for so exposed a place the day was calm) already slanting southward, submissive to the prevalent wind. He only drew rein once, to tuck his hunting-whip beneath his thigh, and light a fresh cigar, then cantered on, to make up for lost time.

This simple, honest country gentleman was within half an hour to be made wiser than all that live upon the earth; to reap the so common, and yet unknown experience of the Grave; to pass the Gates of Death, and perhaps of Heaven. That good-bye to his wife, so God had willed it, was to be their last adieu; that wave of his hand to the Parson, that nod of his head to the poor hind, were to be his last farewells to his fellow-creatures. But he only reflected that the ground was still very hard, and only regretted that the scent would lie so ill, just as the rest of us to whom sudden Death is beckoning, unseen, for the most part do reflect and regret, though the objects of our thoughts may not be Fox-hunting. The way is more lonely now than ever, and descends into a hollow called Burslem Bottom, a mere trough of turf-road between high-sloping banks, but of such exceeding length, that the clump of fir-trees now hid in fog that crowns the hill at its other extremity, is within sight of Newnham, and 'When I get there,' mutters the unconscious squire, 'I shall hear the hounds if they have been thrown off and found.'

But he never reached Newnham Clump, nor probably beheld it.

CHAPTER IV.—COMING HOME.

Robert the groom has lived with his master long, and knows him well, and much he wonders that the squire, who had seemed so set upon his sport but yesterday, should have changed his mind, and staid at home. His orders were, in case the squire should be late, to go to the meet, and there change horses with his master, unless Mr Frederick should arrive, in which case Robert would have to give up his mare to him and go home on foot; but the hounds have met and drawn one cover, and still, though the fog has cleared, and the day is fine, and the ground is better than could have been expected, it is plain that Mr Blissett is not coming. There is a whimper in the copse outside of which the groom has placed himself, and then another and another, and the big brown he sits pricks her pointed ears, and stamps the ground, and the blood comes to Robert's cheek, and his eyes grow wistful, horse and man feeling like one; but now that the hounds have found, and, as it seems, are breaking cover in the direction opposite to Allgrove, all hope of master's coming has faded, and there is nothing for it but to turn rein, and be off home. This idea the big brown combats with much excitement and persistency, both her fore-legs raised appealingly in the air against her rider's view of the matter, and covering her bit with foam, in frantic endeavour to express herself, till good-natured Robert loses patience, and cutting her over the head with the whip, and growling 'Quiet, you precious fool!' turns her right round, and gives her the spur.

Up the slippery chalk-road to Newnham Clump, beyond which and all along Burslem Bottom the fog hangs heavily still; so heavily, that for a

moment Robert almost thinks his master may have been lost in it, as strangers in those parts not seldom are, but not such as Frank Blissett, to whom day and night, and storm and shine, upon the downs are almost as one. It is only the dazzling snow, crossing and recrossing, and coming from all quarters at once, that can puzzle the squire, and there has been no snow as yet, although it is quite cold enough for a fall. So Robert descends into the mist, with a slight shiver ('Some goose must be walking over my grave,' says he: 'nothing surely can have happened to master'), and the big brown having given up the point of hunting altogether, begins to sniff and snort—for she knows Burslem Bottom as well as her own manger—and can scarcely be induced to go slowly enough down that greasy hill (for that is her rider's term for it) which leads towards her far-off stable. In the Bottom itself, the mist is so thick that it is almost like riding through a woollen comforter, and so dark that one cannot see ten paces in advance, albeit the sky immediately above, for it is nearly noon, has one round spot in it as red as blood, which is doing duty for the sun.

'Quiet!' exclaims the groom impatiently. 'Stop that noise, will you;' and he reins in his mare to listen. Some noise coming from out the mist beyond has struck, or seemed to strike, his ear, but is not repeated; and on they go, this time in silence, for the brown perceives that her rider is not in the best of tempers, and these humans, she knows, are not to be trifled with. The fact is, Robert is deep in thought with reference to a certain pot of paste for cleaning top-boots, that has been presented to him this morning by a brother-groom, the greatest discovery of the age, as he has been given to understand, and which is expected to bring in about five-and-twenty thousand a year or so to its fortunate inventor. Now, Robert himself has a private receipt for such paste, of which his master (and the squire ought to know, if any man ought) has always expressed his high approbation; and why, Robert would like to inquire of universal nature—with a sensation of having hitherto had his light concealed under a bushel—should not he too take out letters-patent, or the deuce knows what it was called, and realise a fortune, if not to the amount specified, still sufficient to insure the consent of the lodge-keeper's daughter, who has at present, acting under paternal advice, declined to listen to his addresses?

She would keep company with him willingly enough, would Polly; and as to that old curmudgeon, her father, if only this paste for top-boots should turn out to be a success, it would smooth the path of true love, and—

'Darn you, what's the matter with you, you confounded fool!' exclaimed he aloud, as the brown stood stock-still and whinnied again and again; and out from the gloom beyond came an answering whinny and the sound of galloping feet, and presently there loomed out of the mist the form of a riderless horse; and upon the instant, with a chill at his honest heart, Robert knew it was his master's bay. The bridle streamed behind him torn in twain, with a black mark where he had set his foot upon it; the empty stirrups (for the squire was a long-legged man) clanged together beneath him; his eyes, though full of recognition, flashed excitement; his flanks were

bathed in sweat, and yet he shivered. 'Woo, hoss, woo!' said the groom mechanically, turning his anxious eyes around, for the something which he well knew had frightened the trusty beast. 'Master—master!' cried he through his hollowed hands. 'Squire Blissett!—Squire Blissett!' But there was no reply. The horses rubbed their noses together, as it is the fashion of some nations to salute, and the bay grew calm at once, as though all responsibility was now off his shoulders, and the matter placed in safe hands. Leading the bay, and riding the brown, the groom walked slowly on, peering fearfully before him, till presently he was almost thrown to the ground by the sudden and violent swerving of both horses to the right. On the left, lay some object under the high bank, which he could not get them to approach. He therefore dismounted, and knotting their reins together, tied them to the lash of his hunting-whip, and with its handle tightly clutched, came forward to the spot alone.

There lay Squire Blissett of Morden Hall upon his face, with a wound at the back of his head wide enough to let out ten men's lives. Horror-struck as he was, still Robert knelt down at once, and satisfied himself that his master was dead indeed. 'God help him, and God help poor missis!' exclaimed he with a great burst of tears. Then leaving the poor corpse with its glassy eyes to the sky, he remounted the brown, and casting off the bay, to follow or not as it would, rode back along the way he came at headlong speed. Cleaving the mist as though it were blue air, he flew along the Bottom, and up the dangerous hill towards Newnham Clump, while the loose horse thundered at his heels. Such was the poor groom's intense excitement, that he was within that minute period of time or space which is called 'an ace' of riding down a man and horse coming from the opposite direction, and descending the hill with the most cautious leisure. The rider was a little old man with a white hat, the upturned brim of which shewed a blue lining. He wore blue spectacles, albeit the sun was not in a condition to injure the weakest eyesight; and he had a blue cotton umbrella of great size tucked under his arm.

'Thank Heaven, it's Dr Fungus!' exclaimed Robert fervently, as the brown, perceiving the obstacle, stopped short, and nearly shot her rider from the saddle.

'Thank Heaven, it is—which it would not have been if your horse had been as great a fool as yourself,' was the sarcastic rejoinder. 'Are you out of your mind?'

'Yes, sir; leastways, I have just seen enough to make me so. O sir, Squire Blissett lies dead in Burslem Bottom.'

'Dead! How's that?'

'I do not know how, sir; but so I found him, not ten minutes back. Good God, sir, look at my knees!' He pointed with horror to the blood-stains on his buckskin breeches where he had knelt by the side of the dead man. 'Three-quarters of a mile or so, upon the left-hand side yonder, he lies. I was galloping to Newnham to fetch help—or rather some wheeled conveyance to take his poor body home, for he is past all Doctor's work.'

'You are quite sure of that?'

'Quite sure, sir. His skull is broken in, and he lies as cold and stiff as a stone.'

'In that case, you had better ride on as you intended, while I go forward. I saw you at the

meet this morning, did I not? You are Robert, Mr Blissett's groom?' The old gentleman looked him through and through, then nodded encouragingly. 'Ride as fast as you please; there will be nobody of any consequence in your way now. Let your horse have his head, but keep your own; and if you see such a thing as a county magistrate about, bring him back with you.—O yes, I'll stay by your poor master, never fear.' With that the doctor urged his pony slowly down the pitch, while the groom hurried on. 'That's an honest fellow,' muttered the former. 'There's no blood on his hands—nothing wrong about him except his wits. But that sort of fellow is so easily frightened; I daresay I shall find his master alive after all, poor soul.' Here the pony put his fore-feet well together, and glissaded a dozen yards. 'How the deuce folks can gallop in weather like this, and expect not to crack their skulls, is a marvel to me. But Frank Blissett is as well provided as a man can be in that respect—he has got a precious thick one.'

Dr Fungus was not by any means a heartless man; but years of chartered cynicism had soured his tone. He had long given up practice as a surgeon, and devoted himself to antiquarian pursuits, which seemed to alienate him yearly more and more from living humanity; and yet he was fond of society in his Diogenes fashion—fond of the opportunity of being biting and philosophic. Although no sportsman—never known to ride so much as three fields after the hounds—yet he was to be seen at every meet, and, upon the whole, was welcome there, for he had the reputation of being 'a character,' which, in the country, has almost the same attraction which Genius has in town. His pony, his umbrella, his favourite and prevailing tint of blue, were unfailing subjects of jest among the members of the Hunt; and if their jokes were sometimes somewhat rough, he was allowed, in return, to bestow upon them the gall of his bitterness. They called him Toadstool, in delicate raillery of his name; but a better title for him, had they read their Shakespeares (which they had not), and not forgotten their Homers (which they had), would have been Thersites. It had been his intention to reach the Druid Ring that afternoon, for the purpose of measuring a certain monolith, about which a fiery dispute was raging in the columns of an antiquarian journal; but, to do him justice, he thought of nothing now but poor Squire Blissett. Fortunately, the fog was beginning to thin and lift; the objects near at hand to become distinct, and those more distant to grow into being; so that he saw the body plainly enough before he reached it, and was prepared for that swerve his pony gave (for even dumb animals shrink from the presence of Death), which would certainly otherwise have unseated so uncouth a rider. There was no occasion to retain his hold on *Dapple*, for the tying the blue umbrella to his rein was an understood signal to 'stand still.' Then the doctor approached the prostrate man, and knelt down by him as Robert had done, but taking care to avoid the thick red pool that lay about his head.

'Dead,' said he, shaking his gray head—'dead enough, poor fellow!' He took his right arm up, clad in its scarlet bravery, and felt it, and let it gently fall. 'He has not been a living man these four hours. What a frightful blow! and yet the ground here is not so hard. Oh, I see—the stones!' There were two or three large flint-stones, with

cruel angles, lying close by the corpse, and one of them was stained with blood. 'On the back of his head! Now, I don't understand that!' The doctor drew *Dapple* as near to the body as the frightened beast could be prevailed to come, and mounted him; his object was to picture to himself exactly how the thing could have happened. 'Holloa!' He was looking around him very carefully, and this exclamation was caused by something on the ground at a few paces from where he sat. It was the mark of a human footstep. The doctor once more dismounted, and treading very carefully, so as not to destroy the impress, stooped down and examined it. The ground was comparatively soft, and even muddy there; the same footstep was repeated, with its fellow, once, twice, thrice—altogether seven footsteps, coming from the Allgrove direction towards Newnham. 'These could not have been the groom's, for he was coming the other way,' muttered the investigator. 'Good God! it is as I suspected—there has been some foul-play.' The old man's blue spectacles were turned suspiciously all around, for it was clear now for a great distance. The landscape shewed no sign of human life—none on the downland, of which the clouds of vapour, rolling upward, exposed vast spaces momentarily; none on the ploughed fields upon either side the high-banked way. It was a wild and lonesome place, and now made doubly desolate by the presence of death; but the doctor felt in no way 'eerie.' If a British king had been slain there a couple of thousand years ago, then indeed the spot would have had an interest for him that would have closed his lips in reverence; if those blood-stained flints had formed the portion of a cairn, he would have looked upon them with feelings approaching awe; but he was a practical man in respect to all matters that had occurred within the last five hundred years. 'Whoever the scoundrel is, he has had four good hours to get away in; ay, and as *they fly*' (a pair of carrion crows, the only sign of life, were flapping slowly across the Bottom), 'there are two railway stations within five miles. But let us have the length of his foot, at all events.' With the tape that he had brought with him to take the dimensions of the Druid Stone, he accurately measured the footstep; then, struck by a sudden thought, he applied the tape to the sole of the poor squire's top-boot. 'It is the mark of his own foot!' cried he in astonishment. 'What was he walking for? and if walking, how could he have come by his death?'

There was by this time a large moving object on the hill by Newnham Clump, which presently drew nearer, and resolved itself into a spring-cart with three men in it, and two horsemen by its side; the groom, and a stout middle-aged gentleman called Lane, a county magistrate, who had flung himself upon the dead man's horse, and anxiously hurried to the spot, for poor Blissett was his friend as well as his neighbour.

'Good God! what has happened, Fungus?' cried he, as he galloped up a little ahead of the rest.

'Death!' returned the doctor calmly; 'and what is worse than death—MURDER.'

'Murder!' cried the stout gentleman in a hoarse voice. 'Don't say that, for Heaven's sake. Frank Blissett murdered! Impossible!'

'Hush! Make them keep back there—all of them. Let neither man nor horse come near awhile. See here, sir.'

'I see. O Heaven, what a dreadful wound!'

'Call it a blow, Mr Lane.'

'No—never. There is not a soul who would have harmed a hair of Frank Blissett's head in all the county, sir.'

'Perhaps the villain belonged to another county, then,' answered the doctor curtly. 'You are a fox-hunter, and ought to know these matters better than I. Could any man riding along this road have been pitched upon that stone on the back of his head—the *back*, look you? Answer me that.'

'I do not think he could,' said the other gravely—'at least, I have never seen such a case.'

'Of course not. Now, look here before those fellows come and tread them out. Here are footmarks—his own footmarks, for I have measured them—he was walking, you see, and not riding; therefore, the thing is still more incredible, and could not possibly have happened by accident.'

'Yes, it could,' said Mr Lane, after some consideration. 'I see it all now quite plainly. Poor Blissett had been walking along the Bottom, on account of the hardness of the ruts, until he found the road was getting better; then—just here—he grasped the reins, and was about to mount, when something, God knows what, alarmed his horse, and he fell backward on this pointed stone. A tall heavy man like him—Of course it would be his death-blow.'

'A sportsman does not let go of his rein so easily, Mr Lane,' said the doctor, shaking his head.

'Look here, Fungus,' whispered the other eagerly, taking the old man aside. 'For God's sake, don't pursue this discussion. You are an obstinate man, I know, but you are not a heartless one. What does it matter, now our poor friend is gone, whether he fell from foot or horseback? To suppose him murdered, is to suppose a crime not only monstrous and incredible, but without an object. His watch, his money, are untouched; and I will stake my life the poor fellow had not an enemy in the world. On the other hand, by even mooted the idea of foul-play either here or at the Inquest, you will embitter tenfold the misery of his wife and child. Mrs Blissett, poor creature, is in the most delicate health. I doubt whether this blow, even as it is, will not destroy her. Now, for her sake, Fungus, do be ruled by me.'

'It is no wish of mine, Mr Lane,' returned the doctor calmly, 'to make any stir about the matter. I have withdrawn from the profession, and have no reputation to lose in that way; but if this dead man had been my friend, I should think it my first duty to see justice done upon his murderer.'

'He *was* my friend, Dr Fungus, and that is why I adjure you to keep this strange idea of yours to yourself.'

'Very well; so be it. Only, if the coroner asks me at the Inquest—'

'Yes; but he will not ask you,' interrupted the magistrate. 'I am sure such an idea will never enter his head.'

'I daresay not, for no idea ever does,' replied the doctor bluntly. 'They had better place the body in the cart there.'

'You will accompany us to Allgrove?' rejoined Mr Lane with hesitation.

'No, sir; certainly not. I go where I am wanted—not elsewhere. It is only the person who can be what is called "of use" now—though, for my part, I rather doubt even *his* usefulness.'

'I am aware that you are a Freethinker, sir,' observed the magistrate hotly. 'My poor friend here was a simple Christian man; and, forgive me, this sort of talk is peculiarly unwelcome to my ears just now.'

'Very well, then, I'll rid you of it;' and the doctor having, with the utmost deliberation, mounted *Dapple*, trotted away without a word or gesture of farewell as the mournful procession began to move more slowly in the same direction.

'What a shallow, backboneless set they are!' muttered Diogenes with supreme contempt. 'How resolute to think as they wish; how anxious to make things smooth at any cost, are these fine, outspoken, honest country gentlemen! Bah! as for truth, they have not one halfpenny-worth of the genuine article among them. Their justice is sentiment, their religion is bigotry. How right they were to make that man yonder the chairman of their quarter-sessions!'

Mr Lane's round face was as scarlet as the dead man's coat, as he led the way towards the downs. He was well convinced that the idea of murder was a mere chimera of the doctor's brain; one of those ridiculous crotchets of which little Toadstool was as full as an egg was full of meat. The idea of his venturing to call in question the sincerity of his friendship for poor Blissett! He, indeed, who never had a friend, and never would have: the disbelieving, withered anatomy! It was just as likely as not that he might still make himself disagreeable at the inquest, and shock the feelings not only of the poor widow, but of all the best families in the county. The idea of a country gentleman being murdered in broad day, or nearly so, in Breakneckshire! Did he mistake the place for Tipperary? Idiot! and a very mischievous idiot too.—'What is it, Robert!'

'If you please, sir,' said the groom, who had ridden forward, and was touching his hat respectfully, 'I want to have one word with you, Mr Lane.'

'By all means. Say on.'

'Well, sir, with regard to my poor master yonder, with a glance of genuine distress over his shoulder, 'I forgot to say—and, indeed, nobody has asked me—that I moved his poor body round. He was lying on his face at first, sir, when I found him.'

'Ah, poor fellow! He must have turned over, then, just once.'

'Yes, sir; I suppose that must have been it.'

'Of course it was. But, look you, Robert, if you forgot it once, you may forget it again. There is no sort of importance to be attached to the circumstance; but the fact is, Dr Fungus has got it into his head that your good, kind master did not come to his end altogether by fair means.'

'Why, God bless him, sir! who'd ha' hurt him?'

'Ay, who, indeed? Well, it is not my duty to suppress evidence, you know—quite the reverse; but it is just as well not to encourage such a foolish notion as this of the doctor's, if only for your mistress's sake. She will be made wretched enough by this, poor soul. Do you understand?'

'Yes, sir; and very much obliged to you for the hint.'

Robert dropped back, and the chairman of quarter-sessions rode on alone.

'That's curious, though,' reflected he, 'his turning round after such a wound as that; muscular

action, I suppose, or something of that sort. However, I am quite sure I am doing right in saving this poor lady's feelings. What a task I've got before me! Well, we must do our duty in this world, whether it's pleasant or not. His turning himself round after such a wound as that was certainly very curious.'

AMBASSADORS EXTRAORDINARY.

In his *History of Henry VII.*, Lord Bacon tells us how, after two years' experience as a widower, the king grew weary of his consortless condition, and resolved to marry again, if he could find a lady suited to his mind. Rumour spoke loudly of the beauty, virtue, and wealth of the widow of King Ferdinand of Naples, and Henry's thoughts turned in her direction; but he was too cautious a man to take a matrimonial leap in the dark, and too wise to rely upon common report in a matter of such importance. He therefore selected three gentlemen—Francis Marsyn, James Braybrooke, and John Stile—in whose taste and judgment he could confide, to go to the Neapolitan court, and use their eyes and ears in his behalf. Of course, the king of England could not send an embassy to Naples for the avowed purpose of scanning its widowed queen, as if she were a lot on view in the matrimonial market; so my Lady Katherine, Princess of Wales, became seized with a sudden anxiety regarding the health and welfare of her kinswomen in Italy, and wrote them affectionate letters, to deliver which was the ostensible object of the English ambassadors.

The secret instructions received by the chosen three were, as Bacon says, 'most curious and exquisite.' They were drawn up in the form of twenty-four articles, to which the king required categorical answers. By the first three articles, the ambassadors were directed, after delivering their letters to the old queen of Naples, and the young queen her daughter, to note what state the queens kept—whether they held their courts separately or jointly, how they were attended, and in what manner they ordered their household. Other clauses bound them to ascertain how the young queen stood in the affection of her uncle, the king of Aragon, and whether she bore any personal resemblance to him; while they were also to find out by the wisest ways they could devise what land or livelihood the lady had or would have upon her mother's death, either by way of jointure or otherwise, and whether it was hers for her life only, or settled upon her heirs for ever; in short, to learn every possible detail respecting her present fortune and future expectations. So far, the instructions are in keeping with Henry's historical character; but if the first of the Tudors did not care to win a dowerless bride, he looked for something besides money, for the rest of the articles refer to the person of the possible queen of England: nothing would satisfy him but having the catalogue of her condition from top to toe, as if he really felt that upon his choice depended the safety and health of the whole state. Indeed, such a very curious

inquisition were the ambassadors required to make, that we cannot but think Shakspeare knowingly parodied its items in Launce's comical summary of the merits and demerits of his mistress.

They were to mark the age and stature of the young widow; the favour of her visage, whether fat or lean, sharp or round, painted or unpainted; the aspect of her countenance, whether cheerful and amiable, or frowning and 'malincolious,' whether steadfast or 'blushing in communication.' The hue of her complexion, the clearness of her skin, the colour of her hair, the shape of her nose, the breadth of her forehead, the fulness of her bosom, and the peculiarities of her eyes, teeth, and lips were all to be set down. They were to see her hands bare, and note their shape and length, the thickness of her palms, the length and fashion of her fingers and her arms. Whether her neck was long or short, and whether she had any signs of hair about her lips, were things to be specially observed. The sixteenth article runs thus: 'Item, That they endeavour them to speak with the said young queen fasting, and that she may tell unto them some matter at length, and to approach as near to her mouth as they honestly may, to the intent that they may feel the condition of her breath, whether it be sweet or not; and to mark at every time when they speak with her if they feel any savour of spices, rose-waters, or musk by the breath of her mouth or not.' This distrust of feminine artifices breaks out in another instruction to find out the height of her majesty's slippers if she wears any, so that they may not be deceived as to her stature; and if they should be able to get a sight of the royal shoes, not to lose the opportunity of guessing therefrom the shape of the royal feet. Furthermore, the agents in this delicate inquiry were expected to report whether the queen was a great feeder or drinker, if she ate or drank often, and whether she drank wine or water or both; and finally, they were to ascertain if she had any bodily deformity or blemish, any hereditary ailment, or 'sickness of nativity;' whether she was usually in good health, or sometimes ill and sometimes well, with full particulars of such diseases as troubled her.

To prevent all chance of mistake as to the lady's personal attributes, an instruction was inserted to the following effect. 'The king's said servants shall also at their coming to the parts of Spain diligently inquire for some cunning painter having good experience in making and painting of visages and portraits, and such one they shall take with them to the place where the queens make their abode, to the intent that the said painter may draw a picture of the visage and semblance of the young queen as like unto her as it can or may be conveniently done. Which picture and image they shall substantially note and mark in every point and circumstance, so that it agree in similitude and likeness as near as it may possibly to the very visage, countenance, and semblance of the young queen. And in case they may perceive that the painter at the first or second making thereof hath not made the same perfect to the similitude and likeness, or that he hath omitted any feature or circumstance either in colours or other proportions, they shall cause the said painter, or some other, the most

cunning painter they can get, so oftentimes to renew and reform the said picture till it be made perfect and agreeable in every behalf with the image and visage of the said queen.'

The ambassadors arrived in Valencia, where the two queens kept their court, upon the 22d of June 1505, and lost no time in setting about their work, despatching one Bradley, who spoke Italian, to the palace next morning to announce their coming and ask for an audience, which was fixed for five in the afternoon of the same day. At the appointed time, the English envoys presented themselves at the palace, and were conveyed through divers chambers, 'bare and not hanged,' to a room hung with black cloth, with one open window. On the floor was spread a great carpet, whereon, by the window's side, sat the old queen, having her daughter upon her left hand. Both ladies were dressed in black, with black 'kerches' as mourners, 'and in like case were all who waited on the queens.' On the elder queen's right hand stood an ancient duke with a long beard, the Duke Ferdinand of Naples, with two of his sons and other knights and gentlemen to the number of twenty. On the queen's left sat the duke's wife and three daughters, a Greek duchess, the Marchesa de Chara, the Countess de Montorio and De Tortona, and some score ladies and gentlemen beside. The ambassadors presented Princess Katherine's letters, which were received with every civility; and the bearers of them had no reason to be dissatisfied with their own treatment. They learned that, although the two queens kept house jointly, and generally occupied the same chamber, they had their separate establishments, servants, and slaves; ruling the same very orderly with a noble sadness, as they did the city itself, wherein no person did anything contrary to their commandment.

How long the three inquisitors staid at Valencia, does not appear, probably as long as etiquette or decency allowed. At anyrate, they contrived to answer all their royal master's queries, if not so precisely as he wished, at least as fairly as he could reasonably expect; as will be seen from a brief summary of that portion of their report referring to the personal belongings of the lady under inspection.—Age, twenty-seven years, 'and not much more;' complexion, very fair and sanguine; skin, clear as far as could be seen; eyes, grayish-brown; eyebrows, brown and very small, 'like a wire of hair;' teeth, clean and well-set; lips, somewhat round and thick, and guiltless of hair; hair, seemingly brown by the ends to be seen through her kerchiefs; nose, a little rising in the middle, and a little coming and bowing towards the end, she being 'much like nosed unto the queen her mother;' face, unpainted, of a very good size, somewhat round and fat; countenance, cheerful and amiable; neck, comely, well shaped, not very short, nor yet very long, but looking short by reason of the fulness of her bosom, and that being trussed high, after the manner of the country; arms, somewhat round, but well proportioned; hands, soft, fair, and clear-skinned, with right fair small fingers of a proper length. The report goes on to say that the queen spoke only Italian and Spanish, although she understood French and Latin, and that the envoys had found her a woman of but few words, although they rather shrewdly observe, that perhaps she was so taciturn because her mother was always present, and the old lady took care to have 'all the sayings'

to herself, while the young queen 'sat as demure as a maiden, sometimes talking with the ladies that sat about her, with a womanly *lawgheyngs* cheer and countenance, and with a good *agravite*.'

The points upon which the ambassadors were dubious were the queen's height, figure, breath, and forehead. The black 'kerches' forming her majesty's head-dress coming down to her eyebrows, prevented them discerning the proportions of her forehead. They failed in getting to speak with her before she had broken her fast, but at other times, approached as near as they decently dared, without detecting any signs of spices or waters, and were therefore impelled to write: 'We think, verily, by the favour of her visage, and cleanness of her complexion and her mouth, that the said queen is like for to be of a sewit savour and well eyed' (sweet savour and well aired?). A mantle of cloth successfully shrouded the lady's figure from their prying eyes, and her stature they could only guess at. 'When we came into her presence, her grace was sitting on a pillow, and other two times we saw her on her foot going overthwart a chamber that was not broad, where she came in at a door, and came unto the queen her mother, and sat down by her; at which times she wore slippers in such wise that we could not come to a perfect knowledge of her height.' However, they got hold of a pair of the royal slippers somehow, and found them six fingers broad, and of 'large height'; so, putting this and that together, arrived at the conclusion that she was of no high stature, besides being somewhat round and 'well lekeynge,' which made her seem less than she was. Through one Sorya, a servant of the household, these inquisitive gentlemen ascertained that the queen was a good feeder, eating her meat heartily twice a day; seldom drinking, and then commonly water, or cinnamon-water, but sometimes indulging in a little hippocras. They also scraped acquaintance with a Neapolitan named Pascarell, apothecary and in some sort physician to the royal establishment, who had served the young queen since she was a child; and he averred she was free from any bodily 'disconformity,' and enjoyed as good health as any gentlewoman he had ever known.

So far there was nothing unfavourable to King Henry's scheme as touching the lady he desired to honour. As to more mercenary matters, the commissioners reported that the king of Aragon loved his niece right well, and intended to look out a good match for her, promising to come down handsomely in the way of dowry. They also learned from Martyn de Albistur, a naval gentleman, who had been many years in the service of Ferdinand of Naples, that the old king, Don Fernando, had settled upon the old queen, his wife, a yearly rental of forty thousand 'decades'; and upon the young queen, an annual income of thirty thousand decades—the property, in both cases, going to their 'heirs for ever.' Their friend Pascarell, however, assured them that the income left to the two queens amounted together to but forty-two thousand decades, of which amount the younger widow received twenty-four thousand; while, since Naples had been in the hands of the king of Castile, his captain, Gonsal Fernandez, had appropriated all the revenues of the Neapolitan dominions to the use of his army, and the two queens had to content themselves with such an allowance as the Castilian monarch chose to afford them, which did not

exceed fifteen thousand decades. This last bit of information seems to have decided the matter. Henry stirred no further in the affair, and died a widower.

AULD LANGSYNE.

MARVELLOUS is the power of old associations. The familiar nickname you have borne at school or college exercises a spell over you to your dying day; at least, if it do not, you must have been more than usually successful in the cultivation, which all of us think we have to practise for our ease and advantage, of deadened feelings. For my part, I flatter myself I am as carefully weeded of all genuine, spontaneous gush as most of my equals, or even of my superiors; and yet, if the compound householder himself were to rise again, confront me suddenly anywhere, and address me familiarly as Pod (the nickname I bore at school), I feel sure I should, on the spur of the moment, respond not uncordially; and if he were to proceed to ask the loan of half-a-crown, I should be very near (but I should then have had time to recover myself) pulling out the exact sum. I can mention a few cases in point.

There was Percy Wentworth Howard, whom we, who were his familiar form-fellows, used, with school-boys' sardonic pleasure in ignoring high-sounding names, to call Jock. I had not met him more than once or twice since he left school, when one day I saw him at Lord's. He had been several years in India; he had arrived at the rank of captain; he wore a most distinguished air; he was dressed to perfection; and he had with him what looked like a fellow-captain of similar exterior. I came suddenly upon him; and I must confess (what nobody can possibly regret more than I do) that there was (and is) nothing in my outward appearance—from unfashionable hat, down an unstriking face, past well-worn waistcoat and trousers, to clumsy boots—to give promise of an eligible acquaintance; and I have had reason since to believe that if he had been allowed a little time for contemplation and preparation, or if I had called him Captain Howard, or even Howard, he would have cut me. But, as I have said, I came upon him suddenly; and when surprise elicited from me a joyful cry of 'Hollo, Jock!' the familiar voice and name were too much for him, and he greeted me quite cordially; whilst his companion could not believe his eyes, and was obliged to put a glass in one of them, to assist them in discovering the truth. The companion, moreover, was facetious enough to observe afterwards, as I have been informed (by a kind friend), that he 'couldn't think what it was Howard had got hold of.' I had serious thoughts of inviting that companion to fight across a handkerchief (for a British officer who accepts a challenge now a days must be a madman—and I don't think the companion was).

Then there's Bradshaw. I heard the account from his own lips. Bradshaw, having arrived at the age of thirty-five, being (as he has himself been known upon occasion to declare) a perfect gentleman, wearing moustache, beard, eye-glass, and all the appurtenances of a personage who must be set down as at least somebody, displaying a generally haughty demeanour, which, as a stranger once informed him (to his content rather than anything else), 'didn't invite conversation, sir,' and

priding himself upon the fact that he looked *noli me tangere* to perfection, had, nevertheless, a weak point, dating from ever so many years ago, in the majesty which did hedge him. *Fugit irrevocabile verbum*; and the unapproachable Bradshaw could not dissociate himself from a nickname which had stuck to him at school; and that nickname was Jinks. Now, a school-fellow of Bradshaw's and mine, whom we had neither of us seen for many years, had fallen into disrepute, in consequence of having done something 'queer' (or, to be more plain, by no means honourable), and there was a general understanding that the man who had so done could no longer be known. One day, however, I met Bradshaw, and he said to me in an excited manner: 'By Jove! what do you think? I came across So-and-so just now, and it was deuced awkward. I felt inclined to cut him, but he came up to me, and held out his hand and said: "How are you, Jinks?" And what ever are you to do when a fellow calls you Jinks? You must shake hands, you know; and, upon my soul, when I recollect what that fellow was, I can't believe all they say about him.' And I'm very much of Bradshaw's opinion.

Even bishops—if one who was himself eventually a bishop be worthy of credit—cannot altogether rid themselves of the influence of early associations, and are liable to let slip from their tongues, sometimes to their own discomfiture, nicknames or epithets affixed in the days of youth. According to the eventual bishop's story, a reverend gentleman named Villiers, who had just been promoted to a bishopric, and was under the first joyous effects of promotion, encountered in the street, and accosted an old college-friend, saying: 'Ah! how are you, *mad* Talbot?' 'Glad to see you haven't forgotten old names,' answered Talbot sardonically: 'I congratulate you on your bishopric, *lushy* Villiers;' for by this style and title, Latinised and softened by classical scholars into Lucius Villierius, was the right reverend father said to have been known at college.

So deeply rooted, then, and so hard to be eradicated, are the affections and memories of 'auld langsyne,' that I can easily believe Morris, who tells me that he has never recovered from the wrench it required to break off an old friendship. 'If I were to live a hundred years,' said he to me earnestly, 'I would never quarrel irremediably with an old friend.' You may answer sullenly, as Jonah answered, when he was asked: 'Doeest thou well to be angry?' and say bitterly: 'I do well to be angry even unto death;' but if you let your anger carry you as far as Morris's carried him, you will have many an hour of exquisite remorse. The old friend's face will haunt you as you lie awake o' nights; the old friend's face will be the first to stare unexpectedly and unrecognisingly upon you in strange places; the old friend's face will appear like a ghost's in the midst of a joyous company, of whom you are one, and, like a ghost's, will spoil your mirth; the old friend's face, careworn and haggard, will confront you in places of public resort, and you will be smitten with a dreadful pang. Where and when you least look for it, the old friend's face will crop up before you, and assume an expression of utter unconsciousness after one momentary gleam of inexpressible meaning. Better, you will think for the instant, that old fashions had prevailed—that one had slain the other in honourable fight; then the living

might at least have mourned for the dead, saying over his grave: 'Alas, my brother!'

And yet I think Morris, if ever any man had, had a reason for quarrelling irremediably. Let his simple story be heard, and then let judgment be passed.

Suppose that Morris and I are walking arm-in-arm on the unfashionable side of Rotten Row; that is to say, on the narrow path on the Knightsbridge side. On a sudden, Morris mutters between his teeth: 'Confound that fellow—he's everywhere; and he looks exactly like a ghost this time.'

'Whom do you mean?' I ask.

'Do you see that hollow-cheeked, gray-haired man on a very sober roan cob?'

'With a rat-tail?'

'Yes; and the rider has shrunken, old-man's legs; a nose like an eagle's beak; eyes that you can hardly see now, but which used to flash like a falcon's; dropping chin; and stooping shoulders. Yet he was once as handsome a fellow as ever you saw; and you'd hardly believe he is younger than I am.'

'Nonsense! Why, he is as gray as a badger, and you have not a white hair visible.'

'He is younger than I am, for all that; and I, as you know, am considerably on the right side of forty.'

'But do you know him?'

'No; but I can tell you his name: it is Horace Paton. And he haunts me as if he were a ghost—the ghost of the good old times.'

'Then you do know him.'

'No, I do not. I did; but I quarrelled with him, and swore I would never speak to him again. Never you quarrel, old fellow, with an old friend, and swear you'll never speak to him again. He'll haunt you as that man haunts me; he'll upbraid you, by looking old and miserable when you can't sympathise with him and cheer him, as that man upbraids me; he'll pop up wherever you are, and send upon you a whole flood of pleasant recollections, which are turned bitter as gall at the sight of him, when you think what he and you were, and now are.'

'But, my dear Morris, this is not at all like you. How in the world did you ever manage to quarrel so bitterly with anybody?'

'Well, you shall hear. Paton and I were at school together, and at college together; and, though I was a little his senior, we were very intimate. There was scarcely any kind of fun which we did not share, and, what is still more conducive to friendship, there was scarcely a scrape which one got into which was not got into by the other. There was one difficulty, however, into which Paton was continually falling, but which I, through having more means than he had, managed to avoid. Of course, I allude to money-lenders. Well, things came at last to such a pass, that, if he were unable to raise a certain sum, he would have to leave the university for a temporary residence somewhere else—probably in a prison—and then he couldn't go out in honours. And he was a man of considerable acquisitive powers, and with all his knocking about, managed to read pretty hard, so that he stood a fair chance of getting a fellowship. His friends were therefore in consternation, and set about procuring the necessary sum. His kinsfolk were, some unable, some unwilling, to aid him whom they considered a scamp; so the burden fell on college-friends.

What I could, of course I did; and I refused to take any sort of acknowledgment, merely saying that if he were ever in a position to repay, he could, and I felt quite sure would; otherwise, such a matter would go for nothing between him and me. Well, years went on; I had left the university (not without a degree—don't think that); had got through what little money I had; had been unsuccessful in everything I tried my hand at; and had arrived almost at what is called "the lend-me-half-a-crown stage." Indeed, it was all I could do to keep a roof over my head. Dinners I read of, but seldom touched (not for want of inclination); and I was living proof that "man wants but little here below"—just to maintain existence. Seedy to look upon I was, and very weak; and I perused with much interest in the papers the accounts of death "accelerated by starvation." Meanwhile, Paton had obtained his fellowship; had afterwards found lucrative employment; and with his fellowship, must have had a pretty fair income. Still, I knew he had heavy college debts, which would make a hole in his means, and take some time to pay off; so I was not surprised that he did not settle with me; for we had kept up no correspondence since I had paid a visit to his college soon after he was made fellow, and he might know nothing of my affairs. One day, however, I found he had left a card upon me; and meeting two of our common friends, I was informed by them that he had asked them to dine with him on a certain day at his hotel, had called to ask me to join them, and, finding I was out, had begged them to give me the invitation. I was at the lowest ebb just then; I felt that if I were to go and dine with him, the temptation to allude to a settlement would be too strong, and I was conscious how ungracious such behaviour would appear. I questioned our two friends about his circumstances: they told me, as I had surmised from the expensive hotel he was staying at, that he seemed to be very flourishing; and they furthermore said, that he had himself laughingly admitted that he was "rolling in gold," and had informed them that he was going to be married in a very few days. This, of course, involved the abandonment of his fellowship; and if he could afford to give that up, he must either have come into something good or be going to marry "money." If he were going to marry "money," I did not want to be paid from that source, or to give him the notion that I had waited until he was married that I might immediately come down upon him. So I made up my mind what to do. I would not dine with him, for the reasons I have mentioned, and because my seedy appearance would have made it uncomfortable both for him and for me; and I have always shrunk from exposing my friends to that sort of reflected discredit. I therefore wrote him a note, of which I have kept a copy: here it is.

I took the copy, and read: 'DEAR PATON—You were kind enough to send me an invitation by — and —; and you were good enough to leave a card for me at my lodgings. I'm sorry to say I can't dine with you, for several reasons. I'm out at elbows, literally, and out at toes, too, literally; and I shouldn't like to appear at your hotel in that condition. I can get scarcely anything to do; and what I get barely suffices to pay for my lodgings and keep me alive. I am often in a position to excite the envy of that alderman who was envious of a beggar for being hungry. But that is not all. If I

were to dine with you, I feel that it would be ungracious to take that opportunity of alluding to what I could not help mentioning; so I have preferred writing. Perhaps you recollect some pecuniary transactions between us, a few years ago, when I was fortunately able to be of some little service to you; and as I am now so situated that a similar service might be done by you to me, to my great advantage, it will be enough, I daresay, for me to mention the fact. Pray, don't exceed the bounds to which I went; and if it seem good to you, I will consider that I am asking a loan which I will repay when—and I think it will not be long before—I can. Mind, I am not claiming a debt; I am only asking a tit for a tat, a *quid pro quo*. If you really can't do what I want, only write and say so; and I shall be sorry, but—that's all.—Yours faithfully,

EDWARD MORRIS.'

'Well,' said I, 'that seems simple enough. I suppose he called, paid up, and said he had called before for that very purpose.'

'He neither called,' said Morris with a sigh, 'nor took any notice at all of my letter.'

'The Scoundrel!' I muttered between my teeth.

'It seemed to me such a heartless, cruel thing,' continued Morris, 'that, after waiting two or three days, I made a resolution to go to his hotel, tell him my mind, and swear I would never, under any circumstances, speak to him again. It wasn't the money I cared about so much; it was that the man with whom I had shared good and evil, and whom I had helped to save from what appeared to be imminent ruin, seemed not to care a sheet of note-paper whether I died in the gutter or not. I can't pretend to be very virtuous and strict about money-matters; I owe people money myself; but I wouldn't be indifferent to the misfortunes of a man who had done me a kindness, and told me I could return it.'

'Well.'

'I was informed that he had left his hotel the day after — and — had dined with him. They told me, at least, that he was to have done so, and was going straight into the country to be married. As I didn't feel any grudge against his wife, and didn't wish to do anything which might possibly interfere with the pleasantness of her marriage by ruffling her husband's temper, I determined to bide my time.'

'Well,' said I again.

'Some people might suppose that my determination would become weakened by lapse of time; but that is not the case with me. I am far more likely to become set than irresolute about a purpose by deferring it; and the more I reflected on that man's conduct, the more I resolved to break with him for ever. After more than a year, my time came. Circumstances improved with me, and after a while Master Paton appeared on the scene. We were more than once in the same public room together, but, as I do not like public scandals, I determined to wait, unless he should accost me, for a more private opportunity. Men who knew both him and me told me that he often inquired after me; but somehow, though he must have seen me two or three times as plainly as I saw him, he sat at a distance from me, and took great apparent interest in newspapers and periodicals. Did this look as if he had not received my letter, and as if he were unconscious of having acted badly? Besides — and — would have told him at the dinner how matters were with me.'

'How did it end?' I asked.

'One day,' said Morris, 'I went into a large public room, out of which opened the door of a small room. I turned the handle and walked in. The only man there was Paton. I sat down; and Paton, with a great deal of his old exterior coolness, came up to me, held out his hand, and tried to say cordially: "Hollo! Morris, how are you?" I put my hands in my pockets, stood up (for he used to have an occasional fit of hitting out), and said: "I wrote to you a long while ago, and you didn't think fit to notice my letter." "Where did you write to?" asked he, trying to look surprised. "To the — Hotel," said I. "Don't pretend you didn't have the letter; it *must* have reached you. Your conduct is sufficient proof that you had it, or you would have called on me again, or you would not have avoided me, as you have done lately." "I—I—I," stammered he. But I cut him short by saying: "Will you go into the other room, or shall I? The further we are from one another, the better; and, on my solemn oath, I will never speak to you again as long as I live!" I daresay I turned very pale: I know *he* did, and without another word, walked into the large room. I might have been inclined to listen to the excuse that he had not received my letter; only, added to his suspicious conduct whenever he had been in the same room with me lately, was the fact, that he had before, in the old times, ignored a letter I had sent him with his share of a joint hotel-bill in it (about which I had never thought it necessary to remind him), and that his habit of ignoring notes which could not well be replied to without a remittance of money was notorious. I had imagined, however, that he would have considered an old friend's misery quite a different matter.'

'I think you were perfectly justified in acting as you did,' said I warmly.

'Well,' rejoined Morris, 'don't you ever act in the same way. I don't think I would again, whatever provocation I had. By some strange sort of Nemesis, that man confronts me everywhere. I haven't walked here for three years until to-day, and there he is, looking grayer, and older, and sadder, and more shrunken than he was even a week ago, when he startled me by appearing where I could have sworn he would never come; and yet I cannot ask him of his welfare, though he was my old school-fellow, my old comrade, my old friend.'

I think I shall take Morris's advice.

WANTED, A HERMIT.

SOME years ago, when a gentleman wanted to adorn his property, he would build, at suitable spots on the estate, a sham ruined abbey, or a lath-and-plaster feudal castle; or he formed in a secluded spot a modern antiquity in the shape of a hermitage. This is what my relative did; and the neighbouring country-people, imagining that a hermitage of course implied a hermit, deluged him with offers to undertake the situation.

The following letters* are a selection from those he received. They put forward all sorts of reasons for making the offer—a jovial desire to aid in an eccentric enterprise; a romantic turn of

mind; the instability of all human things; an ardent desire to study; being tired of the world, combined with a desire to earn money enough to set up a stationer's shop; disgust because 'no man can convict me of wrong.' Several think it a recommendation that they have travelled all round the world, possibly insinuating that curiosity is not likely to lead them away from completing their engagement; and all insist upon an annuity for the rest of their lives, in addition (but of course subordinate) to the inducements above referred to.

COLCHESTER, the 22d.

SIR—I have taken the liberty of righting to your honour, hoping no offence. I have been informed that you wanted a hermit—that you had it published it on the newspaper. I have not seen it myself, and I am doubtful whether it is true or no. If it be true, I am ready to undertake the office. I am a Cornish man, the now in Colchester. I am now 20 years of age, and 5 feet 8 inches high; and if wanted, I hope you will let me know as soon as you can, for if not wanted, I am going to do as soon as the return of post. —I am your humble servant, HENRY JENKINS, at Rd. Jenkins Bulder, Guter Street, Colchester, Essex.

November the 2d.

SIR—Having been informed that you want a person to confine as hermit in a place provided by you for their reception, and hearing by report of your offers for such persons, I shall be happy to know your terms by letter, as likewise a description of the place. Imagining that such a place would answer me, an answer by return of post would favour your most obedient and humble servant, J. HARDISLEY.

No. 1 Hungerford Market, Strand.—Post Paid.

BRAINTREE, 18th November.

SIR—Having promiscuously heard of your intention to engage the persons for the term of seven years to serve in a solitary cell, and you yourself engage to furnish such persons with every necessary article, such as books, music, clothes, and the necessities of life, on conditions that such individuals refrain from shaving, cutting their hair or finger-nails, and you at the expiration of that term do promise to settle on such individuals an income for the remainder of their life. My motive for writing is, that I myself, not being averse to such an engagement, provided things are satisfactory arranged, if the above be true, and you like to state conditions, shall feel obliged by an answer, as I shall decline an interview without a further knowledge of the matter. Should what I have written be a false report, I ask pardon for intruding on you by letter. Should you think proper to answer this, please direct—A. B., Mr Birds, Braintree, Essex.

BOCKING, 22d January.

SIR—It has for some weeks past been currently report here you wanted to engage two men to live in a close retirement under ground for the space of five years, for curiosity; and after the expiration of that period, to allow them something annually during the remainder of their lives. Now, sir, if two men are actually wanting for that purpose, we two, whose names are inserted, John Hayes and George Rogers, both in the parish of Bocking, will

* The whole of the correspondence in this paper is genuine.

engage the undertaking conditionally; shall, sir, be glad to hear from you immediately, to let us know whether there is any such thing, and if there is, send us word, when we shall wait on you on the subject, as we have seriously thought on the matter, and are resolved to undertake it, providing we come to an agreement. If there is no such thing, we humbly beg you pardon for troubling you.—We subscribe ourselves, sir, your most humble obedient servants, JOHN HAYES and GEORGE ROGERS.

Address to John Hayes, Jun., Church Street, Bocking, Essex.

WORTHY SIR—Overwhelming *unhappy* circumstances since the death of my wife at Buckingham, my daughter not then two years old; many years a commissioned officer, upon *immediate* duty over his *late* majesty; my *humble* services required in a civil situation, April 9th, in all *humility* we supplicated small benevolent aid; to *AVAIL* myself of *this blessing*, only a *life-interest* upon L.400 four per cents.; L.15, 5s. 4d. annually, with consequent expenses. Our illnesses create *PRIVATIONS*, forcing painful applications; we experience the *instability* of all human things, with *reasonable* hopes of *BETTER TIMES*. By deaths, lost four *valuable* friends, who would have *spared* the *OBTRUSION* of our *distress*, whose eminent exalted Christian virtues *exceed all praise*. Abstain from a melancholy detail. In my 50 year; finally happy to authenticate our faithful peculiar case.—I remain, worthy sir, your obedient servant, BEN PARR.

February 25.

February 8, BRAINTREE, ESSEX.

SIR—The extraordinary request contained in my letter will no doubt command your attention. I am informed that Mr — of — Lodge wishes for a gentleman to inhabit his hermitage, and to take upon him the appearance and *all the habits* of a hermit for the term of seven years, which, being expired, he is to inherit two hundred pounds for his life. I shall not enter fully into those various and particular reasons which make me anxious for so romantic an undertaking, but I might mention amongst others a romantic turn of mind, the loss of near and dear ties of blood, kindred, friendship, and relationship. My letter shall be short. Don't abuse my confidence by making it public, for the acute sense which Heaven has given me for the loss of one who was my very life, and who died lately, might make the promulgation of my sorrows dangerous to your honour as a man and a gentleman, and might endanger my youthful reputation as a surgeon in practice at the place.—I have the honour to be, sir, your obedient servant, JOHN —, Licentiate of Apothecaries Hall, and Member of your Royal College of Surgeons.

STEEPLE, July 28.

SIR—i heard that you wanted a man as an hermit. If you are not engaged, if you be so good as to let me know, i will at annety time come and see you at annety that you send me word, and hear about it. i am about 33 years of age; and if you have got a man, pray, sir, be so good as to send word by the return of post. Direct for James Godfrey, Steeple. I hope, sir, you will excuse my ritting, for i am but a bad scholar.

SIR—Understanding that you have particularly wished to have a hermit on your estate, and myself being fond of seclusion and retirement, offer myself

to you if the terms are agreeable. Knowing that I can subject myself to many privations, and having an ardent desire to peruse different works, doubt not but that I should meet your expectations if an interview will be allowed, and your real determination to possess such a person on your estates, should be happy to accede to your terms proffered. A line addressed to Y. Z., Post-office, Mount Street, Grosvenor Square, will meet attention from y^rs respectfully.

January 15.

SIR—Having, through the medium of an individual who resided some time since in your neighbourhood, heard that you had offered to reward any young person who would consent to seclude herself from all society for the term of seven years, I, tired of the world, wearied with the ingratitude of those I have seen, and betrayed by those in whome I have confided, would not hesitate one moment to accept your proposal, as it would not only give me an opportunity of improving my mind and understanding, but would enable me to forget those attachments which I am assured must ultimately create disappointment, disgust, and wretchedness. My parents are poor, but highly respectable tradespeople, and I feel that I ought not to be a burden upon them. I have been received in good society, and I cannot bring my mind to consent to *SERVE* those as a dependant whome I have hitherto associated with as companions. I shall never marry, because I cannot enter into the *pleasures* and advantages of being obliged to pass my days with a man whose whole stock of refinement, sentiment, and education is crushed in his *profits*; and I am very sure a man possessing the qualifications I *could* admire would never marry me. I cannot on my own account go into that sort of bussiness that would be congenial to my feelings (I can be a woman of bussiness occasionally), because I have not the means; therefore, unprovided for, destitute as I am, I would willingly gratify your curiosity, in the hope that at the expiration of seven years you would advance me a small sum of money to enable me to take a house, and by retaining stationary, and exerting my little abilities to ornament the rooms of those who are too idle or too liberal to do so themselves. Should you, sir, still feel an inclination to see a human being made frightful, you will oblige me by returning a line as soon as convenient, addressed to Miss F. H. I., Gower Street, North Bedford Square.

London, July.

BILLERICAT, May 28.

SIR—Hearing that you wished a person to submit to solitary confinement for a certain period, I shall feel obliged by knowing your terms. I am 20 years of age, and sound constitution.—I remain, sir, your most obedient servant, CHARLES M.

THENFIELD, October 7.

HONOURED SIR—I hope you will not be offended at the liberty I have taken of addressing you. Having heard of some strange reports, from persons who live at C—, of a cave on your estate, in which you want a person to reside, secluded from all intercourse with society; and having myself an earnest desire to live in seclusion, if not taking too much liberty, and too much on your goodness, I should wish you to send the particulars by post. Of course you would not expect a person to remain if injurious to his health, and have no

objection to provide him with books for study, as that is the principal cause of my wishing for such a retirement. If my proposal should meet your approbation, and we could agree, upon condition, of course, I shall disclose my real name and residence. Have the kindness to direct to W. W.—, Brentwood, Essex. An early answer would oblige your humble servant,
W. W.—.

I have at present a situation as teacher at a school near Brentwood, and I am twenty years of age.

MINORIES, LONDON, 15th August.

SIR—I have obtained a knowledge of your having built a residence expressly for the reception of any one who would seclude himself from the world, and consent to other provisions which you might in agreement. I am a young man, yet tired of the ills and wrongs which are imposed by the world and its cares; disgusted with even its pleasures, which are mockeries, and which are delusive beyond the adequacy of words to convey a right idea, or impart a right impression. Think not, sir, that I have seen but little of the world, or that I have formed wrong notions of its peculiarities. I have been bred in one of the professions, a profession I admire, and would continue to study even in seclusion. If the conveniences approximate to balance the inconveniences, O that I was away from the world, and to occupy my time and attention with nought but study.

Study and pleasing solitude
Will make an heaven of such abode,
Where vanity would ne'er intrude,
To alter nature, or reverse her mode.

But what reason have I for leaving the world? Am I burdened by pecuniary difficulty? I owe no man ought. Have I any reason to fear the law? I have not. No man can convict me of wrong; and here is the source of my disgust. I have treated all men with confidence. But what have I received in return? Instead of confidence, it has been ingratitude. Merit cannot meet with reward. Flattery and pride reign in uninterrupted sway. Should you think fit to communicate particulars, I shall receive and attend to them with satisfaction.

BAILEY.

SIR—Understanding that — has amongst its charming varieties an elysium—commonly called an hermitage, so welcome a retreat, how many thousands like myself daily sigh for—and that you seek wonderfully, and as yet have sought in vain, for some one to inhabit it for the space of seven, allow me to offer myself to your particular notice. I have seen hardships not a few, burnt out, and cast away, besides disappointments *præsenstrere longium est*. I have been round the world, and, unfortunately, too long in it. Allow me *hic subscribe meipsum* yours in toto,
Z—.

Direction—to be left at Mr Walters, Hand Court, Bedford Road.

31st October.

December 13th.

SIR—Having heard that you wish for a person to occupy your hermitage for the period of five years, at the expiration of that time to have a certain sum of money. I am aged twenty-three years, single, no encumbrance whatever, have travelled all over the world. Should your hermitage be still vacant, and this meet your approval, please

address, P. P., to John Courtoy, 2 Dramand Point, East India.

SUDBURY, March 22.

SIR—I understand that you want a urmit, and if you pleas, i will take the chance. And if i take the chance, i will go through with it if i loose my life. And if you pleas to let me come, send me word by the return of post, and the perticklers.—So i remain your most humble, obedient, and obliged servant,
T. PARSONOM.

Direct for T. Parsomon, at Mrs Tolerday Stint, Grir Street, Sudbury, Suffolk.

A CHANCE MEETING.

Two ships upon life's boundless sea
We meet: we hold the self-same way
A few short days, then compasses
Compel our parting: we obey.

Yet for some time we miss the ship
That by us used to heave and bound
Upon the waves, nor o'er them catch
From off that deck the welcome sound

Of captain speaking to his men,
Of voices answering to our cheer;
Nor creak of rope, nor flap of sail
Speak sympathy unto our ear.

Away the friendly vessel cleaves,
And we hold on our usual course;
A little sad our heart-strings feel,
Our pulses lack their wonted force.

Though never more, perchance, we meet
That stranger ship upon the main,
Is there no port which—peril past
Of wind and waves—we hope to gain?

Where, lying safe from angry storm,
We find at last that ship once more,
And greet her inmates heart to heart,
As if old friends, upon the shore?

Surely, O friend, it may be so;
Though thou and I have parted hands,
We meet again with firmer clasp,
Life's ocean crossed, on Heaven's sands.

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2d. To insure the return of papers that may prove ineligible, postage-stamps should in every case accompany them.

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